

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Director

Prevention of Cancer.—According to a recent statement by the United States Public Health Service, one of the reasons why so many people die of cancer lies in the fact that the disease usually exists for some time before it is recognized and treated. It has then progressed from a local and small cancer to a large and dangerous one. It is, therefore, of importance that everyone should know something of the first symptoms of this disease.

If a beginning cancer was as painful as a sting, many people would go promptly to a physician and so receive the needed treatment early. But at first there is no pain or inconvenience. The symptoms develop gradually. Any lump, especially in the breast, which comes and remains for some time without satisfactory explanation should be looked upon with suspicion. One should go immediately to a competent physician. In many cases the suspicion of cancer will have been unfounded, but it is best to be safe.

Any sore that does not heal in persons above 35 years of age, particularly about the tongue, mouth or lips, is suspicious of cancer. Attention should be given to a spot where a tooth is broken or where there is an ill-fitting dental plate which has rubbed until a sore has resulted.

Any irregular bleeding or abnormal discharge from any of the orifices of the body is a danger signal which should be promptly heeded.

Persistent indigestion with loss of weight is a symptom of cancer of the stomach, which is so frequent as to make its earliest possible detection important.

There is no evidence to show that cancer is contagious. There is, therefore, no occasion to shun a person who has cancer, so far as danger of contracting the disease is concerned. The precautions to be taken by those who come in contact with cancer patients are only such as should be followed with infected wounds. Cancer is a disease against which improved sanitation is not capable of producing any effect, and personal hygiene has but a limited application.

It is desirable to treat all diseases in their early stages, but in no affection is it more necessary than in cancer. The danger is like that of a fire. At first there is but a spark which can readily be extinguished. As the flames spread the fire becomes more and more unmanageable. At last a consuming fire develops and control is no longer within human power.

The organized war against cancer which is being carried on in all civilized countries aims to discover all individual cases of the disease at the earliest possible time, and to advise competent medical care for the patient. The patient must give full cooperation to the medical profession, for it is obviously impossible for a physician to render any help unless the patient applies for it. The first thing, then, is for the public to learn the danger signals of cancer and report immediately to a physician upon suspicion being aroused that cancer is present or impending.

The second line of attack is research. More facts about cancer need to be discovered; how and why it occurs; by what procedure it may be prevented and cured. There is a great deal of information upon these subjects already, but there is need for more.

Many cases of cancer can be cured, and many more prevented, if the general public will give its full cooperation to the medical profession, which is striving to eliminate this disease.

Physical examinations at periodic intervals made with an eye alert to cancer, afford one of the best

means of protection against this disease. Such examinations should be taken once a year after the age of 35 has been reached.

Surgery, x-ray, and radium are the main weapons which are used to combat this disease. They are used as a preventive and as a cure. They are employed as preventives when they remove precancerous conditions, and as a cure when they eliminate cancer itself.

One of the reasons why cancer is so frequently fatal lies in the fact that those attacked are at first inclined to temporize with the condition. Some try home remedies, others put their faith in the advice of persons who know little or nothing about this subject.

When a person suspects that he or she has cancer the thing to do is to apply immediately to a competent physician or to a clinic. If he has a good family physician, that is the person to be consulted. If he wants to find a good physician he should select one who stands well among his fellows, one who occupies a responsible position in a hospital, one who is recommended by some other good doctor.

The cancer problem is, of course, the most baffling of those in the field of preventive medicine yet remaining unsolved. We should listen to no voice of discouragement. It is only by extending the present centers of cancer research and by creating new centers that success will ever be attained.

Oakland Makes Health Census of School Children.

In an effort to extend the program of immunization against communicable diseases, Dr. A. H. Hieronymus, City Health Officer of Oakland, has undertaken a health survey of pupils in attendance upon the public schools of the city. Cards are issued to parents and guardians of school children, upon which vital information relative to the medical history of the pupil is asked. Every pupil in the public schools, from the kindergarten to the high school, is included in the survey. Complete histories, relative to the communicable diseases from which the child may have suffered, are asked for, as well as histories of immunization procedures. Doctor Hieronymus has secured the services of a statistician who will compile a report of the census which will constitute an important factor in the inauguration of a complete survey for the immunization of all school children against both diphtheria and smallpox.

Psittacosis Cases Reported.—At least two outbreaks of psittacosis, "parrot fever," have occurred in California during December and there is a strong possibility that other cases, as yet undiscovered, may have occurred within the state. The outbreaks that have been discovered and investigated by the State Department of Public Health are in Nevada and Merced counties. In Nevada County a traveling bird-van appeared in the community November 18, 19, and 20. In one family, a pair of parakeets was purchased November 20. One of these birds was taken sick and died about December 2. Two adult guests of the family became ill December 3; a member of the family was taken ill on December 5, and still another on December 14. All of these individuals presented symptoms typical of psittacosis and all of them died. There is a case of illness in a young adult who cared for one of these patients, and it is considered that this individual is suffering from a mild case of psittacosis. It is apparent that the disease may be contracted from person to person, as well as from birds, but such cases are not of frequent occurrence.

In Merced County two parakeets were purchased the last of November. One bird died December 25 and the other December 27. The mother of the family, who is past sixty years of age, at this writing is very ill. Young adults in the family who are contacts have, as yet, shown no signs of illness. These birds in

Merced County were also purchased from a traveling bird vender. Steps have been taken to locate this man and to determine the source of supply.

Health officers are warned to be alert for cases of illness in families which have recently acquired parrots, parakeets, or similar birds from unknown dealers. Such birds should not be handled. If they show any signs of illness, extreme care should be used in feeding them. It is important that gloves of impervious material be worn while handling parrots or similar birds if they are sick and they should be kept in strict isolation.

Apparently, psittacosis may be transmitted by birds that are, to all appearances, in good health as well as by sick birds. Cold weather may precipitate illness in an apparently well bird, with the presumption that such a bird may have been a carrier of the virus of the disease. It may also be possible to contract the disease through contact with the cage which has housed a sick bird.

Psittacosis was reported extensively in the United States in 1929 and 1930. According to the records of the United States Public Health Service, 169 cases of psittacosis with thirty-three deaths occurred in the United States from November 1929 to May 1930. These cases occurred in fifteen states and the District of Columbia and do not include sixteen laboratory infections with two deaths, nor twelve probable cases which were removed from two merchant ships entering United States ports following exposure, aboard ship, to parrots purchased in Germany and Brazil. In California, from December 1929 to January 1930, ten cases of psittacosis with two deaths were reported. One of these fatal cases occurred on shipboard en route from Los Angeles to Honolulu. It was because of the appearance of the disease in the United States that President Hoover, early in 1930, issued an executive order under which the importation of parrots from foreign countries was forbidden. This order was modified October 31, 1930.

The Epidemiological Report of the Health Section of the Secretariat of the League of Nations for April 15, 1930, carries a most extensive report on psittacosis. Although it is a rare disease, mention of it has appeared in medical reports for at least fifty years. Extensive outbreaks occurred in Paris in 1892, with fifty-one cases and sixteen deaths. A severe outbreak occurred in Germany in 1909; a similar outbreak in Scotland in 1924; and one case occurred in the United States in 1928.

Most epidemics of psittacosis are small outbreaks which are confined to members of the same family and to persons living in the same house. Most cases are in persons who have been in direct contact with sick parrots or birds belonging to that group. It is said that the attack is more serious when contracted from a bite or peck by the bird. The incubation period is generally from eight to fifteen days and the onset is sudden. The beginning symptoms may be chills, vomiting and headache, malaise, diarrhea or constipation. Pulmonary symptoms are always present and the pneumonia is atypical. The pulmonary symptoms, however, may not be the immediate cause of death. A typical symptom is the almost complete absence of expectoration even when the pulmonary symptoms are serious. Sputum, when present, is sometimes rusty but is never blood-stained, as in typical pneumonia. The nervous symptoms are marked. Psittacosis patients are pale and weak. Their cheeks are not flushed and the respiratory silence is more typical than it is in pneumonia. The history of contact with a sick parrot is an important link in the chain of evidence which leads to diagnosis of the disease.

The Hooper Foundation for Medical Research, Dr. Karl F. Meyer, director, is cooperating with the State Department of Public Health in the laboratory work connected with the investigation into psittacosis in California.

BOARD OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

By CHARLES B. PINKHAM, M. D.
Secretary of the Board

News Items, March 1932

The 1931 annual report of the Board of Medical Examiners was recently filed with Governor Rolph. Five hundred and fifty-seven licenses of various classes were issued of which 505 were physicians and surgeons. Written examination records show that 93 per cent of the total number of applicants passed. Fifty-four medical schools, both in the United States and abroad, sent 336 applicants before the board for written examination. One hundred and seventy-three reciprocity certificates were issued, Illinois sending the largest number, Minnesota second, Ohio and Iowa tying for third. Thirty-nine California physicians and surgeons sought registration in other states. Thirty-four licentiates were called before the board for various indiscretions, the larger number being charged with narcotic violation. Sixteen licenses were revoked, four suspended, four placed on probation, eight dismissed, and two cases unfinished. The legal reports, both north and south, show continued activity in discouraging violations of the law. Comment was made that "Many of the worst fakers in the United States come to California to prey on those who are afflicted with some bodily ill, and unfortunately, no matter how utterly ridiculous the system of treatment may be, there are always many who fall for it and lose not only their money but, in many cases, their chance for life itself by delaying the proper treatment too long. This is especially true of cancer sufferers. They have been singled out as the legitimate prey of scores of fakers who, with some mysterious but worthless nostrum or method of treatment, obtain hundreds of thousands of dollars annually from these poor sufferers without giving anything of value in return." Two hundred and thirty-eight licentiates passed to the Great Beyond during the year.

"Dr. Edward M. Palette, prominent Los Angeles physician and former assistant city health officer, was appointed a member of the State Board of Health by Governor James Rolph, Jr., yesterday, according to Sacramento dispatches . . ." (*Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News*, January 20, 1932).

At the regular meeting of the Board of Medical Examiners held in Los Angeles, February 1 to 4 inclusive, the following changes were made in the status of licentiates: George H. Bland, M. D., Fresno, license revoked February 2, 1932, for violation of probation re narcotics; William B. Hamilton, M. D., license revoked February 2, 1932, based on revocation of his Utah license on which he obtained his California reciprocity license; Clarke S. Smith, M. D., Oakland, license revoked February 2, 1932, for violation of the terms of his probation re narcotics; Alfred G. R. Castles, M. D., Los Angeles, placed on probation for five years, February 2, 1932, based on advertising contrary to law; Cary A. Snoddy, M. D., Vallejo, found guilty February 2, 1932, in connection with narcotic indiscretions, was placed on probation for a period of five years without narcotic privileges. Aubrey H. Staples, M. D., Oakland, found guilty of narcotic indiscretions, was on February 2, 1932, placed on probation for a period of five years without narcotic privileges; on February 2, 1932, the board found Maurice J. Pullman, chiroprapist, Los Angeles, guilty of advertising contrary to law, and deferred imposition of penalty until the July meeting; the revoked license of Roy L. Buffum, M. D., Long Beach, was on February 2, 1932, restored, and he was placed on probation for a period of five years without alcohol or narcotic privileges; the revoked license of John H. Seiffert, M. D., San Diego, was restored February 1,